



UNITED STATES GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE
REGIONAL OFFICE

FEDERAL BUILDING 16TH FLOOR WEST
230 SOUTH DEARBORN STREET
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS 60604

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9 DEC 1976

Mr. Daniel Cooney, Hospital Director
Veterans Administration Hospital
54th Street and 48th Avenue South
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55417

Dear Mr. Cooney

The General Accounting Office recently evaluated the operation of the Minneapolis Veterans Administration (VA) Hospital's fire station at Fort Snelling, Minnesota. We have concluded that, because of limited equipment and personnel, the quality of protection provided by the station is inferior to the protection received by other hospitals in the adjacent cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul. Fire protection of much higher quality is available from either Minneapolis or St. Paul and could probably be obtained on a contractual basis at a lower cost than that needed to operate the VA fire station. We therefore recommend that negotiations be undertaken to obtain fire protection services from one of the adjacent cities, preferably Minneapolis because of its closer proximity. If negotiations are successful, we recommend that operation of the VA fire station be discontinued.

These recommendations are based on the following principal findings developed during our evaluation

--The VA fire station equipment is limited mainly to two 750 gallons-per-minute (g p.m.) pumper trucks. Responses to alarms are normally made with only one truck and four or five firefighters. The station has no ladder truck and therefore has quite limited capability to combat fires or provide emergency rescue of patients and employees at any of the upper floors of the 8-story hospital structure. Although back-up support is available from the Minneapolis Fire Department, it is not called on during first alarms. Therefore, for emergencies where such back-up equipment is needed, valuable response time is lost. This imposes a high life-safety risk on all patients and employees at the hospital.

--Both Minneapolis and St. Paul fire departments respond to all first alarm hospital calls with more firefighters and with more and

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better equipment. Minneapolis, for example, responds to all hospital calls with three pumpers, two of which have 1,250 g.p.m. pumping capacity, two ladder trucks, a rescue unit, and about 20 to 24 fire-fighters.

--The nearest Minneapolis station is located less than 1 mile from the VA hospital and could respond in 2 minutes. This response time is better than that of the VA fire station

--The General Services Administration (GSA) has elected to contract with Minneapolis for fire protection of its facilities at Fort Snelling. GSA officials consider VA's fire equipment inadequate for rescue and protection of its 6-story Federal office building at Fort Snelling. The recognized need for high quality fire protection, such as that provided the Federal office building, would seem much more critical with respect to the VA hospital. GSA's contract with Minneapolis required payments of less than \$10,000 last year. 17

--The fire protection responsibility of VA's fire station was substantially reduced several years ago when ownership of about 50 buildings at Fort Snelling was transferred to the State of Minnesota. These buildings now receive fire protection services from St. Paul and other fire departments.

--While the costs of contractual fire protection services cannot be estimated until negotiations with local sources are completed, on the basis of provisions contained in other Minneapolis and St. Paul fire protection contracts, and assuming VA's fire station were discontinued, VA's annual fire protection costs could be significantly reduced. VA's fire station currently employs 20 full-time firefighters and operates at a cost of about \$250,000 annually.

--VA's contract payments to Minneapolis or St. Paul would likely have beneficial results in their budgeting processes. Such benefits would tend to compliment other Federal programs involving aid to local governments.

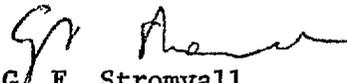
--The Minneapolis Hospital is currently in the process of replacing its fire alarm system at a cost of about \$400,000. It is therefore urgent to consider other possible fire protection alternatives in order to allow for timely modifications to the alarm system that would be necessary if VA's fire station were discontinued.

We would appreciate being advised of any actions taken or planned on the matters discussed in this report. Members of our Twin Cities

suboffice staff will be glad to meet and further discuss these matters with you. Copies of this report are being forwarded to the Chief Medical Director and the Director, Internal Audit Service, VA Central Office.

We wish to acknowledge the courtesies and cooperation extended our representatives during this evaluation.

Sincerely yours,


G. F. Stromvall
Regional Manager